

Middlebury alumni reflect on experiences in politics and government



COURETSY OF BEN ARQUIT

Ben Arquit '20 is a legislative correspondent for Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine).

By **RACHEL LU**
Editor at Large

Over the past few weeks, The Campus talked with six alumni working in politics and government to hear about their experiences, how Middlebury shaped their careers and the moment they caught the political bug.

Mason Arndt '21 is currently a staff assistant for Senator Alex Padilla (D-Calif.). Arndt's role includes corresponding with constituents and other senate offices, assisting legislative correspondents, leading the internship program and giving tours.

After graduating in 2021, Arndt taught English in Spain for a year as a Fulbright Scholar. His passion for education led him to work on the education, labor, housing and homelessness portfolio in the senate office. Arndt said if he ever leaves politics, he hopes to be an educator.

Arndt did not come to Middlebury knowing he wanted to

go into politics. In the fall of his junior year, Arndt studied abroad in Chile where he witnessed political protests that piqued his interest. Upon returning, Arndt took several political science classes, most memorably with Charles A. Dana Professors of Political Science Erik Bleich and Murray Dry.

"Those classes unveiled huge complexities in politics that I haven't really noticed before," said Arndt. "I think it made politics seem like much more of a challenge, and being up close with those particular challenges made politics feel more real rather than something off in the distance.

They felt like problems that we could solve."

When Covid-19 interrupted Arndt's final months of junior year, he interned with the congressional campaign of Joe Neguse, a Democrat representing Colorado's second district. The campaign led to a summer internship in the House of Representatives, and the experience helped Arndt get to his current position.

"I felt like I had convictions and ideas about what I would want to see, and that pushed me towards

forming those ideas. If I didn't have certain goals about what I want to change in politics then I wouldn't be in it," Arndt said.

Unlike Arndt, Ben Arquit '20 said he has been interested in politics and news since he was little, and he was a political science and economics double major at Middlebury. Arquit is currently a legislative correspondent for Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine), working specifically on health care policy.

Arquit said every day on the Hill looks different for him. There are long term projects including introducing legislation, preparing for committee hearings and making sure the senator's goals are prioritized throughout congress. Other times, his work is more reactive, such as when certain votes come up or if the senator has last-minute meetings.

"Especially on days when we are in session, you come into work in the morning, you think you'll be doing XYZ, and by 11 a.m. something hits the news and everything changes," Arquit said.

Alex Davidson '17 attributes his interest in politics to his background and the community at Middlebury. Davidson is currently the executive assistant to the chief of staff for the deputy secretary of defense. In this role, he balances supporting the chief of staff in assisting the deputy secretary and managing the office.

Davidson said his primary interest is in security issues, which comes from understanding the racially and culturally diverse household he grew up in. At Middlebury, he was exposed to a wide array of people that informed his experience.

"Middlebury enforced for me what I thought was a really diverse array of people from across the globe," Davidson said. "Being able to live with them and learn from them, and apply those lessons to the work that I do now is really great."

While some alumni moved to Washington, D.C. to pursue politics, Alex Demoly '22 decided to stay in Vermont. Demoly is economic development specialist at the Greater Burlington Industrial Corp, which is tasked with performing economic development services for Vermont, including helping open businesses in the greater Burlington area and

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LOCAL

Proposition 5 to add Reproductive Liberty Amendment to Vermont constitution

By **SUSANNA SCHATZ**
Local Editor

On election day, Vermont voters will decide whether or not to include Proposition 5, the Reproductive Liberty Amendment, in the Vermont Constitution as the 22nd Article. The Reproductive Liberty Amendment would enshrine reproductive autonomy in the state constitution.

Article 22 reads as follows: "That an individual's right to personal reproductive autonomy is central to the liberty and dignity to determine one's own

life course and shall not be denied or infringed unless justified by a compelling State interest achieved by the least restrictive means."

The immediate implications of Proposition 5 passing in the upcoming election are likely nil, according to Political Science Professor Bert Johnson. Reproductive rights are currently protected by the Freedom of Choice Act in Vermont, a law passed in 2019 that protects individuals' right to choose or refuse contraception or sterilization, and to choose to carry a pregnancy to term or have an abortion.

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COURTESY OF BOBBY LOCICERO

Indi Schoenherr speaking at the Reproductive Amendment rally in May.

LOCAL

Why Republican Gov. Phil Scott keeps winning in Vermont

By **MAGGIE REYNOLDS**
Senior Local Editor

Vermont holds the record for the most consecutive victories for governors seeking reelection. Over the past half-century, all 18 of the state's governors who have made bids for reelection were successful.

A number of states have high rates of reelecting incumbent governors — in 2014, the national reelection rate was 74.9% over the past 50 years. According to former Governor Jim Douglas, Vermont's smaller population and geographic size, along with two-year gubernatorial terms, position Vermont incumbents particularly well for reelection.

These factors have served incumbent governor Phil Scott well over the past six years. Scott, a Republican, won the 2016 election by 8.7%, the 2018 election by 14.9%, and the 2020 election by 41.1%.

Scott appears well-positioned to defeat Democratic candidate Brenda Siegel in this month's

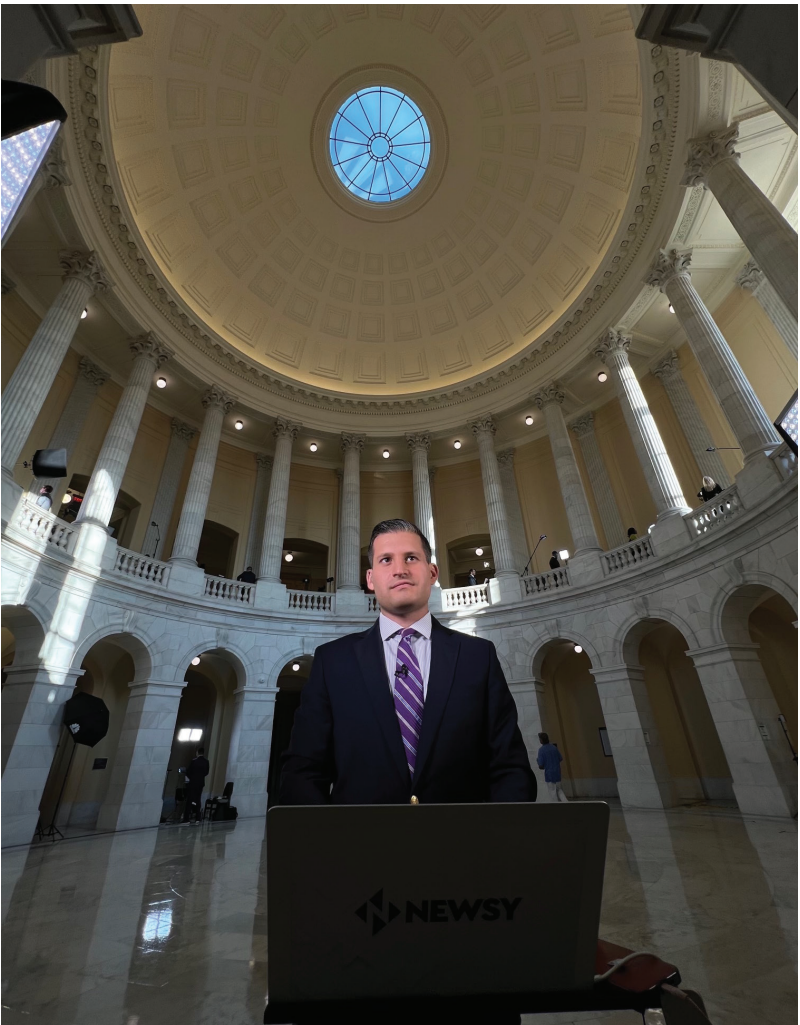
election.

With an overwhelmingly Democratic-leaning state legislature, two Democrat Senators, and a Democrat Representative, Scott's success is perhaps surprising. According to Political Science Professor Matt Dickinson, however, Vermonters like to balance their left-leaning elected officials with some conservative influence.

"[This] reflects a broader sense of concern about allowing either party to have majority control over the governor's office, Senate and House, or their equivalent," Dickinson told The Campus. Dickinson added that this is a trend across several New England states. In Massachusetts, Republican governor Charlie Baker serves alongside a Democrat controlled state legislature. Republican Chris Sununu presides over New Hampshire, a state which voted for Biden by a margin of 7.3% in the 2020 presidential election.

Dickinson said he believes Vermonters are drawn to electing a Democratic legislature, which they expect to address issues such

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COURTESY OF NATHANIEL REED

Nathaniel Reed '18 serves as a Congressional Correspondent for Newsy, covering news on Capitol Hill.

NEWS

MiddVotes looks to expand voter turnout ahead of midterm elections

By BRIDGET McDONAGH

Professor Matt Dickinson predicts Republicans taking the House, a 50-50 Senate

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Burlington citizens to vote on \$165 million bond to rebuild Burlington High School

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Senator Leahy retires, Welch and Malloy vie for Senate seat

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OPINIONS

Crossing the threshold into action: How Middlebury can do more this election

By MAGGIE BRYAN & FREDDI MITCHELL

In support of a more effective Credit/No Credit option

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"Freedom Dreaming" imagines an anti-racist Middlebury community

By RAIN JI

Students and professors share election night rituals

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Remembering Butch Varno

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XC teams compete in NESCAC Championships

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MIDDVOTES LOOKS TO EXPAND VOTER TURNOUT AHEAD OF MIDTERM ELECTIONS

By **BRIDGET McDONAGH**
Contributing Writer

MiddVotes — a nonpartisan club that works to increase civic engagement — is tackling midterm election voting head on.

“MiddVotes is passionate and enthusiastic when it comes to voter registration and civic engagement,” said Sophie Levine ’23, president of MiddVotes.

The club’s primary goal is to be a resource that students feel welcome to approach with any questions they have about voting.

MiddVotes’ main mission is to encourage voter turnout — regardless of candidate preference or location of voting — through voter registration drives. MiddVotes currently holds drives on Wednesdays at the Davis Family Library from 4:30 p.m. until 6:30 p.m. and Fridays in front of Proctor Dining Hall from 12:30 p.m. until 2:30 p.m.

Levine said that MiddVotes is always looking for volunteers to help with voter registration drives and that the club will provide voter registration training for anyone interested in getting involved. Currently, MiddVotes is also hoping to provide a shuttle service to help students get to the polls in downtown Middlebury.

Due to the emphasis MiddVotes places on remaining non-partisan, the club’s events do not involve helping other political groups on campus that are affiliated with a particular party.

“Civic engagement does not have to be partisan because voting is inherently a non-partisan activity,” Levine said.



TOM NEVINS/THE MIDDLEBURY CAMPUS

Middlebury voters can cast their ballots at the Middlebury Recreation Center.

The most important takeaway Levine hopes people gain through MiddVotes is that, above all, the club is a resource for the politically curious.

“If you have questions please come to us,” Levine said. “We have free stamps to help you mail ballots. We have absentee ballot forms. We send out emails about the deadline of registering when to vote in your state. We are a passionate and enthusiastic resource when it comes to voter registration and civic engagement.”

The club holds their meetings

at the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) roughly once every two weeks. The typical MiddVotes club meeting is an opportunity to discuss creative strategies to get students excited about civic engagement including voting. “The meetings are non-formal and anyone can come,” Levine said.

The most important aspect about each meeting for those leading the club is that everyone’s voice is heard and everyone’s ideas are taken seriously, which Levine says is achieved through “democratizing

the club.”

Levine believes the growth in members over the past few years has allowed for loosening the stiff hierarchy that existed when she first joined. The Student Activities Office requires that every club on campus must have a president and treasurer for administrative reasons, but other than those two formal roles, she said, “everyone ends up taking on what they are most comfortable with and, as a result, there aren’t really titles because everything happens organically.”

For instance, Levine said,

members who feel confident in their technological ability might naturally fall into handling the social media accounts while others might engage in face to face interaction and end up coordinating voter registration drives. As president, Levine handles logistics such as registering events on Middlebury Presence. She views herself as a vessel through which members are able to communicate their ideas to the board. To her, the most important part of being a leader is “intentionally making sure everyone gets a voice.”

JAMES MORONE ’75 ON “REPUBLIC OF WRATH: HOW AMERICAN POLITICS TURNED TRIBAL”

By **MADELEINE KAPTEIN**
Copy Editor

The Rohatyn Center for Global Affairs (RCGA) hosted a talk on Oct. 20 by James Morone ’75, Middlebury alum and John Hazen White Professor of Public Policy at Brown University, entitled “Republic of Wrath: How American Politics Turned Tribal” after his most recent book published in 2020. This talk was the first event of the new RCGA program “Global Trends in Autocracy and Democracy,” sponsored by the Cangiano family. Morone’s accolades include winning “notable book of 1991” by the New York Times, the American Political Science Association’s Gladys M. Kammerer Award for best book on national policy and a Pulitzer Prize nomination.

He began the talk with what he sees as the heart of the issue: Divisive partisanship is currently the most intense it has been in American history. Morone cited that former President Donald Trump, after losing the 2020 election by 7 million votes, claimed the results were invalid. He also said there are 345 officials now running for office claiming that the last election was illegitimate and stolen.

When Morone was a student at Middlebury in the early 1970s, 5% of Democrats and Republicans in the United States said they would be concerned if their child married across party lines — that statistic is now over 70%.

“What has changed now that makes our politics so vulnerable to partisanship?” Morone asked.

In a lecture complete with

visuals, Morone guided the listeners through three major “acts” of American history, sprinkled with stories and personal anecdotes. He examined this history through the lens of “the two great culture wars” in the country’s nature, race and immigration.

America became an immigrant nation with a large and constant influx of people of different nationalities, according to Morone. The U.S. is designed in a way that makes fear of the “other” and the idea of “us vs. them” continuous, and public policy reflects this.

Through these history “acts,” Morone outlined how the original American political parties effectively divided the culture war issues. Conservative Federalists pushed to restrict immigration but supported racial rights. On the contrary, Democrats promoted immigration but were the party of white supremacy. The battles over immigration and race were heated, but separate.

These culture wars intensified when African Americans migrated to the north and began voting for Democrats. By 1964, 90% of African Americans were democrats, and the white vote shied away. President Johnson reopened the gate to immigration and advocated for bringing immigrants back into the Civil Rights movement as the Latino and Asian American votes also shifted towards democrats, Morone explained.

With these demographic changes and shifted political alignments, both parties were heavily incentivised to fight the culture wars. Voters began to see politics through this filter of race and immigration, and the gap in the parties’ preferred policy

widened tremendously.

Morone emphasized the surge of inequality that has coincided with these divisions. Measures of economic inequality have shown a significant increase in inequality in the U.S. between 1970 and today, while countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Canada, France and Japan have all seen declines in inequality during the same time period.

Morone concluded with a spark of hope for the future. “There’s a whole new cohort always coming into American politics, and today that cohort is very, very different,” he said. “I’m optimistic, because I think my students are just more reliable as people with values than we ever were.”

“This new generation stands out because community is more important, volunteering is more important, conflict is looked down on more, they are much more open in terms of sexuality, gender identity, race and interracial marriage. I think it’s a much more tolerant, understanding and participatory generation,” Morone said.

Student attendee Prannoy Thakore ’25.5 shared why he was inclined to come hear Morone speak. “I’m a political science major, so I took [Charles A. Dana Professor of Political Science] Murray Dry’s class last semester and a lot of the questions I’ve had about political science started there. I am an American citizen, but I’m also an international student, so I’ve never really had a connection with the country — when you hear about all of these things in the news, eventually you have to go ahead and question it, and try to figure it all out,” he said.

Giving talks like this gives Morone the chance to tell stories and answer questions that let him



COURTESY PHOTO

James Morone ’75 is the John Hazen White Professor of Public Policy at Brown University.

see the topic in a different way. “Giving a talk at Middlebury is a whole separate thing, because I feel like I’m talking to the latest generation of people who are going through an experience that is different but also has a family resemblance to what I went through here,” Monroe added.

Sebnem Gumuscu — professor of Political Science, fellow of the Rohatyn Center and one of the directors of the new Global Trends in Autocracy and Democracy program — expressed

excitement about the upcoming events the program will bring, including more guest lectures, panels, workshops and larger conventions.

On Nov. 15, the center will host a virtual talk by Staffan I. Lindberg, professor and director of the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg titled “Cause for Alarm? Global Data on Democracy and Autocracy.”

Middlebury alumni reflect on experiences in politics and government

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assisting them to stay profitable. Demoly believes Middlebury students should consider staying in Vermont after graduating.

“Middlebury students are specially equipped with their education to tackle the issues in Vermont, and obviously across the world as well, but I think spending four years in Vermont is a great privilege to have,” Demoly said. “I think Middlebury students would be pleasantly surprised if they stayed in Vermont for another four years.”

Teddy Smyth ’15 found himself drawn back to his home state, Georgia. Smyth is currently the executive director at the Georgia House Democratic Caucus. Smyth describes his job as helping democrats in Georgia take power, and this involves recruiting and supporting candidates to find and fund strong electoral campaigns and eventually win seats.

Previously, Smyth worked on the Biden-Harris presidential campaign and is proud to have been on the team that flipped Georgia from red to blue when President Joe Biden won the state with 49.5% of the vote in 2020.

“Part of why I went to Middlebury and had to leave Georgia, of course for my education, but also I felt like I needed to learn some things and live in other places until demographics changed enough in Georgia that we had a shot,” Smyth said. “I felt like I was working my way back to Georgia, so I’m proud to be part of the team to flip Georgia, and to be back.”

At Middlebury, Smyth was an Environmental Studies major with an environmental policy focus, and he was interested

in the impact of state policies on climate. Smyth worked on many campaigns and he believes electing the right people can help achieve policy goals.

“I still know how much better we can do, however climate and, in general, environmental issues are one piece of the fight,” Smyth said. “Why I love working to change power and change decision makers, is once you get good people elected, they will fight for climate and a host of other issues that will change people’s lives.”

Smyth said he graduated in 2015 with a sense of optimism that was dampened by the 2016 election of Donald Trump.

“That was demoralizing and hard. I’ve had to learn to live the best life and be the best person I can in the context of doing good but sometimes frustrating work,” Smyth said. Smyth believes he still holds the same work ethic that allows him to build a positive work culture in the political world, because the work is long and tireless.

Similar to Smyth, Nathaniel Reed ’18 recalls the 2016 presidential election as an important turning point that set him on his career path.

“That night in McCullough at Crossroads watching the election results come in, [Professor of Political Science] Bert Johnson and [Professor of Political Science] Matt Dickinson were on the stage trying to make sense of the numbers coming in, and it was just an unbelievable sense of dread amongst my peers and the students,” Reed said.

Reed is a congressional correspondent for Newsy, and he covers Capitol Hill and reports on Congress; during campaign season, Reed reports around the country. At Middlebury, he was a Political Science and Film joint major with an interest in journalism.

“When I started at Middlebury, I always knew I wanted to do political science and film, pretty much from the moment I started,” Reed said. “The one thing that kept changing though, I wasn’t ever sure what I wanted to do, I knew I wanted to do news but very generally thought I would do television news. I thought it was monolithic, but it’s not.”

During the 2016 presidential election, media outlets including the New York Times and Huffington Post predicted an easy win for Hillary Clinton. Reed said the election left him confused: How did the news get it all wrong? To Reed, this was an opportunity.

“I left with a renewed sense that I want to do television news and cover politics,” Reed said. “That’s when the politics bug bit me, because the rise of Trumpism was so unbelievably fascinating, and mostly because it did not get the news’ attention and the critical thinking that it deserved before 2016.”

Reed encourages Middlebury students interested in journalism to reach out to alumni and seek out internship opportunities. Arquit echoes the sentiment that anyone interested in politics should try out an internship on Capitol Hill.

“This is one of the greatest jobs you can have right after college. Just the exposure you can get to some important and influential people, and the connections you make with coworkers in your office and other offices on the Hill,” Arquit said. “It teaches you how to write really well, how to communicate really well. It checks off the boxes for any job. It’s one of the coolest things I’ve ever done, and walking into Capitol Hill every morning still gives me butterflies.”

Professor Matt Dickinson predicts Republicans taking the House, a 50-50 Senate

By LILY JONES
News Editor

Professor of Political Science Matt Dickinson has been traveling around Vermont to give his analysis and predictions on the outcome of the 2022 national midterm elections on Nov. 8.

“There are three constants in life: death, taxes and the president’s party will lose seats in the midterms,” Dickinson said.

Based on an aggregate of several popular political science theories on midterm election forecasting, Dickinson predicts that Democrats will lose their majority in the House.

“My best guess is that Republicans are going to pick up between 28–34 seats, which will give them more than enough to give them a majority in the house,” Dickinson said.

Senate election results, Dickinson said, are harder to predict.

“There are fewer races and the factors that influence Senate races are a little more idiosyncratic. Candidate quality matters more, and states are less homogenous [than House districts],” Dickinson said.

“Control of the Senate is going to come down to the outcome of six races: Arizona, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Georgia, North Carolina and Nevada,” Dickinson said. He predicts that Republicans are going to pick up Nevada and Democrats are going to pick up Pennsylvania, and the Senate will likely end in a 50-50 split, as it is right now.

“For the Senate, there is a little bit of art, where you have an intuition based in part on what you’re seeing in advertising and debates and other factors,” Dickinson said. “The races in both states are very fluid, making accurate predictions regarding control of the Senate very difficult.”

Dickinson predicts that the

Vermont races for the U.S. House, Senate and Lieutenant Governor seats will go to Democratic candidates. However, he expects the Gubernatorial seat will stay with the incumbent, Republican Governor Phil Scott.

The U.S. House seat, open for the first time since Peter Welch was elected in 2006, was only competitive during the primary when victor Sen. Becca Balint (D-Windham) faced off against Lieutenant Governor Molly Gray, according to Dickinson.

“[Balint’s] opponent is someone who won’t even identify as a Republican, Liam Madden, and she is going to win that,” Dickinson said.

Similarly, Dickinson predicts that current House Representative Peter Welch will easily win the Senate race, especially as Vermont Republicans nominated a “Trumpy” candidate Gerald Malloy.

“The Republican party is not large enough in this state to overcome Welch’s advantage. But even if it was, it’s divided. It’s not as ‘Trumpy’ as the Republican party nationally,” Dickinson said.

In the Vermont Gubernatorial race, Dickinson predicts that Scott will win “pretty comfortably” over Democrat Brenda Seigel. “On various issues, for instance his handling of Covid-19, per capita Covid deaths were much lower than other states, he just gets good marks,” Dickinson said.

The only race that Dickinson thinks will be truly competitive, is the race for Vermont’s Lieutenant Governor.

“I think, because of the naturally blue lean of the state and because David Zuckerman is more well-known, although his unfavorables are also higher than Benning, I think Zuckerman is going to pull this out,” Dickinson said.

Tentatively, there will be an Election Night viewing party at Crossroads Café on Nov. 8 from 7-10:30 PM.

Student group Middlebury Civics In Action encourages civic engagement in talks and workshops

By TIFFANY LI
Contributing Writer

Middlebury Civics in Action (Midd CIA), co-founded by President Erin Chouinard ’24 and Vice President Ethan Schmitt ’24.5 in spring 2022, is a student group aiming to help students get directly involved in the political process and to provide education regarding active civic engagement.

“It’s a club focused on fostering and giving students the skills they need to advocate in the legislature and the government, in order to strengthen the democracy of the country itself,” Chouinard said.

Although it holds regular meetings and events, Midd CIA does not yet have final approval from the Student Activities Office and is not currently an official student organization. It hopes to gain approval this semester.

One of Midd CIA’s main objectives this year is to prepare students to testify at public legislative hearings at the Vermont State House. These hearings are an opportunity for lawmakers to hear voter’s direct input on bills that may be passed into law. Last year, the newly founded club did not provide testimony but toured the Vermont State House, watched State Senate proceedings and sat in on a women’s caucus meeting.

“When there’s a public hearing of a bill, students will be able to go there and testify in front of legislature legislators to try to persuade them one way or another to vote for or against the bill,” Schmitt said.

Midd CIA does not persuade students to advocate for certain positions, and instead encourages students to find issues and bills

that they are passionate about. The time limit for each person’s oral testimony varies from two to five minutes depending on the hearing. To help students with public speaking, CIA held workshops with Oratory Now.

In addition to helping students testify, Midd CIA also provides general education about how the U.S. government functions and student engagement in the political process. Group meetings also include lectures by Schmitt, whose familiarity with Vermont politics comes from growing up in the state. One of these lectures discussed the power of the personal story in swaying legislators’ votes. Other topics include how a bill becomes a law and the logistics of the midterm elections.

“If students feel comfortable testifying, that’s great,” Schmitt said. “But they also are here more for the educational side of things, to learn about how the system works, to hear about specific bills and know what’s happened in the state house, or even to support other students in their advocacy.”

The Midd CIA group is not explicitly affiliated with a political party.

“The club leadership is nonpartisan, so we can’t persuade a student one way or another to advocate a certain way. We try to maintain that objectivity so people feel comfortable bringing whatever beliefs they have to the table,” Schmitt said. He emphasized wanting students to feel accepted in the club regardless of what political views they held.

Hinda Ibraahim ’25, who runs Midd CIA’s social media and communications, said this atmosphere of acceptance was something she appreciated when she first joined.

“It just seemed like a space where I was going to be heard and listened to, and everyone was so welcoming,” she said. “I saw it as

an opportunity to not only be a voice for POC, but specifically Black women and uplift their voices, since their voices are the most silenced, especially in this country.”

In addition to educational meetings and preparing to testify at hearings, Midd CIA also hosted former Vermont Governor Jim Douglas on Oct. 20 to speak to members about his experience in state government.

“We hope to bring in more legislators and senators to come and speak about the importance of public engagement in politics,” Chouinard said.

In addition, the group coordinated with the Student Government Association and Center for Community Engagement (CCE) to organize Beyond the Ballot: Why Civic Engagement Matters at Middlebury College. This non-partisan discussion series is part of the Democracy Initiatives, sponsored by the CCE, and aims to promote active participation in civics among students. According to the CCE, “all qualified candidates for the positions represented by the candidates present were invited to this event, regardless of party affiliation.”

As part of the Beyond the Ballot events, Midd CIA was involved in organizing a Nov. 1 visit to campus by David Zuckerman, a Progressive/Democratic candidate for Lieutenant Governor for Vermont in the 2022 midterms. Students had an opportunity to hear Zuckerman’s discussion opposite Middlebury political science Professor Matthew Dickinson.

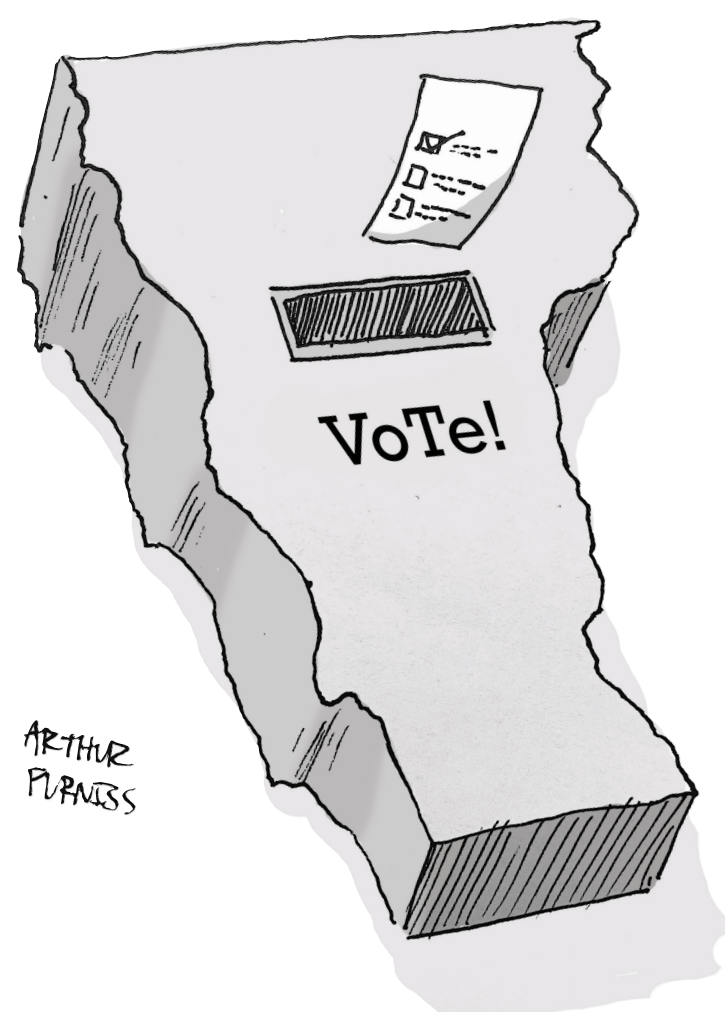
Dickinson also held a conversation sponsored by Midd CIA on Nov. 2 with Joe Benning, candidate for Lieutenant Governor; Sarah Copeland-Hanzas, candidate for Vermont Secretary of State; and Mike Pieciak, candidate for state Treasurer.

The group is also planning a watch party open to any students for the upcoming midterm elections.

Schmitt says that Midd CIA plans to invite more politicians from the Republican party to speak to students.

“There may not be other groups on campus that are going to support candidates like that, and since we have that basic, nonpartisan outlook as a group, we were thinking about helping with those events,” Schmitt said.

Regarding the future of the group, Midd CIA hopes to expand both within and beyond Middlebury. This year, they have about ten members and anticipate increasing membership in the spring semester.



Burlington citizens to vote on \$165 million bond to rebuild Burlington High School

By **JULIA PEPPER**
Local Editor

Burlington citizens will vote on Nov. 8 on a proposed \$165 million taxpayer bond to support the demolition of the old Burlington High School and Technical Center buildings and build a new school. Since the discovery that the old building was contaminated with Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), Burlington High School (BHS) students have been attending classes in a vacant Macy’s store. BHS is Burlington’s only public high school and serves around 1,000 students. In addition to the high school, Burlington Technical Center provides training for workforce development, specifically skills like aviation, design illustration, healthcare sciences and hospital workforces. All students in the Burlington school district attend BHS, and students in 10th and 11th grade can apply to the technical center.

In 2018, a \$70 million bond was approved to renovate the existing high school building. According to Clare Wool, the school board chairperson of the Burlington School District, a bond is like a withdrawal of money from taxpayers. It includes assurance for taxpayers that their money will be spent responsibly, and also that any money not actually spent will be returned to taxpayers or never spent in the first place. More information about bonds for the project can be found on the district website. The renovations the district had planned to use the 2018 bond for would have focused on making the school more accessible, efficient and safe. While preparing for this renovation, however, consultants for the renovation discovered that the building had unsafe levels of PCB contamination.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, PCBs are man-made organic chemicals consisting of carbon, hydrogen and chlorine atoms. They were manufactured in the U.S. from 1929 until 1979, when they were banned by the Toxic Substances Control Act. During the time when they were still manufactured, PCBs were used in electrical and heat transfer equipment, paints, pigments and other industrial applications.

“PCBs have been found to have a variety of adverse health effects,” according to the EPA. Studies on animals have shown that PCBs can cause cancer as well as other serious non-cancer health effects. Studies have also found evidence for potential carcinogenic and non-carcinogenic effects of PCBs in humans.

When PCBs were found in BHS in fall 2020, the information was reported to the EPA and the Vermont Department of Health. Experts reviewed the contaminant levels, and advised that the school be shut down for health and safety reasons.

BHS was moved into a vacant Macy’s store in Burlington in March 2021.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLARE WOOL

Student support for construction of the new high school.

Although adjustments were made to improve the space, it is a temporary and imperfect solution.

According to Tom Flanagan, the superintendent of Burlington schools, the community has adjusted to the new location as best as possible.

“When we first closed down... a lot of families got really nervous and left. And then we moved into Macy’s... families were really nervous about whether or not they wanted to send their kids to our school. And now we’re two years in there, and it’s not the long term place. There aren’t windows, the walls are not built for the long term, but it’s actually been a really good place and served us well. And that’s because of the adults in the community,” Flanagan said in a Zoom interview with The Campus.

As superintendent, Flanagan’s job includes overseeing the Burlington district’s nine schools, attended by between 3,500 and 4,000 students.

“My job is to make sure that our schools are safe, that they’re welcoming, that our kids are learning and feel like they belong, and that our staff are supported and able to do that,” Flanagan said.

He works with other members of school leadership, and provides a link between the school board and the school district.

While finding a solution for BHS is just one aspect of Flanagan’s job, it has been time consuming. Part of his role has been to keep Burlington citizens up to date so they have the necessary information to make an informed voting decision. Information and updates about BHS have been disseminated through numerous presentations, responses to frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the Burlington School District Website, five town halls and meetings with constituents, according to

Flanagan.

“We’ve laid out a clear rationale. It’s logical: We were forced to leave our building; we can’t go back to that building because it’s broken. We identified the least expensive option to get a state of the art school that our community needs... I think people here are smart, they’re progressive, they understand why education is important and why they need to support it,” Flanagan said. “I don’t know how people will end up voting, but I have faith in Burlingtonians.”

Of the initial \$70 million bond, only four million has been spent. That money went to state testing and development, as well as PCB testing. The remaining \$66 million was returned to residents or never spent, according to an article in VTdigger.

The proposed \$165 million bond would cover building demolition and construction for the new high school and technical center. Currently, the Macy’s lease costs the district \$1.5 million each year. The lease is set to end in 2025, underscoring the urgency to find a new space. The lease could potentially be renewed, but this would mean that other possible economic projects could not come to fruition in the space, according to Wool. There are potential plans for housing and retail in that area, she said, which would boost the city’s vibrancy as well as its economy through tax revenue.

Wool, the school board chairperson of the Burlington School District, is pushing for voters to pass the bond. Wool has been chair for five years and has volunteered in the schools for the last 12. She explained that a lot of the money for the project will likely be coming from state funds, not Burlington residents’ taxes.

“The state has \$32 million dollars to

distribute for PCB funding, for schools that have been harmed by PCB,” she said in a call with The Campus. “They currently have not decided how to distribute that. Burlington is asking for \$22 million of that \$32 million.”

As BHS is the only school in the state shut down due to PCBs, Wool believes they are first in line for this aid. Demolishing the building and cleaning the soil is expected to cost the entire \$22 million.

A new school building must then be built. “We have chosen the least expensive, but most economical and frugal footprint,” Wool said. The district has worked with architecture firms and talked to estimators to ensure that the plan is feasible and will stay within budget.

Wool has been working to communicate with locals and convey the importance of passing the bond. “We’re not selling people on it, we’re educating [them],” she said. “It’s political: You’ve [Burlington voters] got to give us the bond so that we can get the rest of the money from the state.”

State aid for construction or reconstruction of schools used to be the norm in Vermont. Many states have construction aid, a system where states help pay for school upkeep. Construction aid provides 30 to 40% of the cost to maintain a school. Vermont used to have state aid for construction projects, but stopped this policy in 2007, according to another VTdigger article.

Wool said the aid program was stopped because the Vermont population was too small to earmark funds for construction aid. This meant that towns are responsible for their own upkeep, which presents challenges when situations like that of BHS arise. Wool and others have testified in Montpelier several times and asked for state assis-

tance in funding school reconstruction projects.

The school district also hopes to lobby the governor for financial support. In addition to the previously mentioned \$32 million, the school board plans to ask the governor for an additional \$42 million. This would reduce the amount of money that would end up being contributed by taxpayers.

Wool stressed that having a functioning high school is essential to the economic health of Burlington and the state. “Why people move to Vermont, and why families grow here is because of public education,” she said. “We’re very lucky that in Burlington we have the medical center and various universities. Here we have a situation where I believe Burlington is the largest economic engine for the state. We pay the most money tax wise to the state... Burlington citizens can’t take on this huge expense by themselves... We need some federal and state relief.”

For the state to be eligible for this aid, however, the bond must first be approved in the upcoming election. However, its approval is not a guarantee of funding. And according to Wool, it’s not clear if voters will cast ballots in favor of the bond.

Many residents of Burlington are financially struggling, and have been hurt by the pandemic and rising taxes, leading to uncertainty about their willingness to approve such a large bond. Yet Wool believes Burlingtonians share an understanding of the need for the bond to pass to support the new high school and technical center.

Both Flanagan and Wool feel optimistic about the plan. “[This story] shouldn’t be depressing,” Wool said. “We’re a vibrant state with a lot of smart people who’ve got to make it work.”

Political Action Committees (PACs) and Becca Balint’s campaign for the House, an explainer

By **RACHEL LU**
Editor at Large

Since August, Vermont State Sen. Becca Balint’s (D-Windham) campaign has been under scrutiny for a \$1 million contribution from the LGBTQ Victory Fund Federal PAC, which was later revealed to be a donation by a cryptocurrency mogul. The role of money became a central controversy in the Democratic House race between Balint and Vermont Lieutenant Governor Molly Gray.

But what exactly is a PAC? The Campus spoke to professors in the Political Science Department to get the answer.

A political action committee (PAC) is a political committee that uses money in the context of an election campaign for po-

litical office. PACs may donate money directly to candidates, or spend independently of any candidates. Super PACs are a type of PAC required to make independent expenditures only, meaning that they cannot donate directly to candidates, but may receive and spend without limits. Hybrid PACs, like the LGBTQ Victory Fund, have separate accounts for direct contributions to candidates that are subject to the limitations of typical PACs and for unlimited independent spending subject to the limitations of Super PACs.

Professor of Political Science Bert Johnson explained that depending on the type of the PAC, there are different rules and regulations for how the money can be raised. PACs are far more likely to donate to candidates whose positions they agree with.

“The goal of a PAC is usually to move the needle in terms of the resources available to a candidate. You want to do that if you are supporting your friends. Similarly, PACs are likely to support people

who agree with them,” Johnson told The Campus.

Professor of Political Science Matt Dickinson told The Campus that some local political observers raised the possibility that the Victory Fund was an effort to influence Balint’s campaign. Balint’s campaign manager told Seven Days that neither Balint nor any of her campaign staff had met or heard of the cryptocurrency executive who made the donation to the Victory Fund, and denounced this type of campaign spending — allowed under the Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision — as problematic.

Independent expenditures, such as those made by Super PACs and some parts of a hybrid PAC, cannot be made in coordination with candidates or their campaigns. The Federal Election Commission (FEC) defines coordination as an expenditure “made in cooperation, consultation or concert with, or at the request or suggestion of, a candidate, a candidate’s authorized committee or

their agents, or a political party committee or its agents.” According to Johnson, however, the definition of coordination between a PAC and a candidate is contested.

“You could say there is some interesting correspondence in terms of the language used, or sometimes a candidate will set up a website with raw video that is just available for the public to use, which then PACs download and put in PAC advertisement,” Johnson said. “That seems to not count as coordination under the law, but again, that definition of coordination is constantly being tested during a campaign.”

The majority of the PAC money spent on Balint’s campaign was used for TV, digital and mailed ads. According to Dickinson, Vermont tends to stay away from high profile elections because its small geographic and population size allows candidates to go door to door, rather than relying heavily on television advertising.

“A lot of research has been done on the impact of advertising

on voting choice. For high profile races, we don’t think TV ads have a huge independent impact,” Dickinson said. “In down ballot races where voters don’t know a lot about the candidates, they [TV ads] might. So it’s possible the super PAC ads had some influence, but I don’t think it was decisive.”

The cryptocurrency donation made to Balint’s campaign was revealed after Balint won the Democratic primary. Dickinson said he believes Balint would have won the democratic primary regardless, but the defining issue of the campaign was money and super PACs.

“I think she [Balint] was the front-runner whether that money was spent or not, but I think it raised some important questions on the role of money in a small state during an election and what can be done to make those contributions more transparent,” Dickinson added.

Proposition 5 to add Reproductive Liberty Amendment to Vermont constitution

Continued from Page 1

The goal of Article 22 is to ensure that already established rights regarding reproduction do not change in Vermont, according to Johnson. For example, if a law were proposed that would restrict abortion rights, the chances of it passing under Article 22 would be slim to none.

Various organizations in the state have taken stances on Proposition 5.

“I think that there is a misunderstanding about what this amendment is offering”

Vermonters for Vermont, a political advocacy group led by Gregory Thayer, ran a “sign wave” campaign opposing Article 22 throughout Vermont. The campaign intended to engage and educate voters on the language of the amendment, on the basis that the wording is vague and unclear. The campaign ran from Oct. 6–25.

The group held a demonstration in Middlebury on the green across from The Middlebury Inn along Route 7 on the afternoon of Friday, Oct. 7. Attendees held signs saying “No Late-Term Abortion Vote No on Article 22.”

The American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont (ACLU), is in support of Proposition 5, while Vermonters for Good Government, is opposed. A spokesperson for each organization spoke with The Campus to provide their viewpoint.

The ACLU works to defend and advance civil liberties of Vermont residents. They defend Vermonters’ constitutional rights through policy advocacy, organizing and public education.

Representative Anne Donahue

(R-Northfield) is a member of the Vermont House of Representatives and is a member of Vermonters for Good Government, a political advocacy organization that opposes Article 22. “Our mission is really to educate Vermonters about what Article 22 actually does in our constitution because we’re concerned,” Donahue said.

She described two main reasons she and Vermonters for Good Government oppose Proposition 5.

First, Donahue believes that Article 22 is too vague and worries about its lack of specificity about third trimester abortions. “The first big concern is that we are locking Vermonters into a place where they can never reconsider the question of elective third term abortions,” Donahue said. “90% of Americans think that elective third term abortions, you know, should have some limits put on them.”

Late-term abortion has been a prominent point of interest in the discourse about Proposition 5. A 2018 Gallup Poll reported that 13% of Americans support third trimester abortion. Donahue noted that under Roe v. Wade, there were limits placed on third trimester abortions.

Some in support of Proposition 5 believe that those opposed who bring up the idea that Article 22 would allow late-term abortions in Vermont do so as a scare tactic. “The Vermont Department of Health publishes those records. We know that 1% of abortions in Vermont are performed at 21 weeks or later and there are zero that are elective abortions,” Lucy Leriche of New England Planned Parenthood said in an NBC5 interview.

“I think that there is a misunderstanding about what this amendment is offering,” said Indi Schoenherr, advocacy fellow at the ACLU of Vermont. “This amendment protects the reproductive rights that already exist in Vermont, and so it’s not going to effectively change anything or open the gateway to some of these extreme things that we’re hearing. That isn’t the current state that we’re in here in Vermont, and I don’t see that being the case.”

The Vermont Department of Health publishes annual Vital Statistics reports, which include statistics on abortions that take

place in Vermont, including figures on how many weeks gestation the fetus was at the time of the abortion. According to the report, in 2020, 1.1% of abortions in Vermont took place at 21 or more weeks gestation.

“The fact that it is on the ballot now means that it has taken at least four years to get there because two different legislatures have to approve it and then it goes to a vote. It would have been impossible to get it onto the ballot as a reaction to the overturning of Roe v. Wade.”

Schoenherr encourages voters to question the motive behind statements regarding Article 22 and third trimester abortions and educate themselves on the amendment through further research on the topic. “Is this something that is genuine, or is this something that is meant to create fear and essentially prevent us from protecting the reproductive rights that we have now,” Schoenherr said.

The second issue with Article 22 identified by Donahue concerns the other aspects of reproductive autonomy, including birth control, rights of minors to make medical decisions related to reproductive health and rights of men in regard to pregnancies. “The problem there is that the original draft of this [amendment] as well as the existing statute give the specifics about it... and this [version] doesn’t,” she said.

According to Donahue, the original draft defined

“reproductive autonomy” as including contraception, abortion and the decision to have a child. Vermonters for Good Government posits that, left undefined, Article 22 will expand the limits of reproductive autonomy to “give the same rights, currently protected for women, to men and children [and] eliminate parental rights concerning our children’s sexual and gender related choices,” according to the organization’s website.

Schoenherr emphasized that the purpose of Article 22 is to prevent lawmakers from restricting reproductive autonomy in the future, including abortion and other reproductive healthcare procedures.

The inclusion of the language of strict scrutiny is an important characteristic of Article 22, according to the ACLU of Vermont. This language explicitly states, “...An individual’s right to reproductive autonomy shall not be denied or infringed... unless justified by a compelling State interest achieved by the least restrictive means.” Cornell law defined strict scrutiny as the highest form of judicial review used to determine constitutionality of laws. This level of scrutiny is implemented to provide the highest level of protection for the specified right. Professor Johnson noted that the language of strict scrutiny also appeared in Roe v. Wade.

While Proposition 5 will appear on the ballot shortly after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, this amendment has been in the works for years. “The fact that it is on the ballot now means that it has taken at least four years to get there because two different legislatures have to approve it and then it goes to a vote,” Professor Johnson said. “It would have been impossible to get it onto the ballot as a reaction to the overturning of Roe v. Wade.”

“If you want to learn about the Reproductive Liberty Amendment, I would encourage people to go to reprolibertyvt.org. It tells you more in-depth about this amendment and what it will do for Vermont,” Schoenherr said. Those eligible can register to vote in Vermont through the day of the election, which is Tuesday, Nov. 8.

Why Republican Gov. Phil Scott keeps winning in Vermont

Continued from Page 1

as housing, education and climate change, while they expect a Republican governor to hold the line on spending. “There is a method to this madness of dividing control of government between Democrats and Republicans,” he said.

Douglas, a Republican who served as governor from 2003 to 2011, said Vermonters tend to go back and forth between an expansionary period of a Democrat governor spending considerable money and a Republican successor figuring out how to pay for it.

“There is that back and forth to provide some balance over time,” Douglas told The Campus.

The past twelve Vermont governors have alternated between the two major political parties. Prior to 1963, Vermont was an overwhelmingly Republican state — Philip Hoff served as the first Democratic governor in over 100 years from 1963 to 1969. The past four governors were Howard Dean (Democrat), Douglas, Peter Shumlin (Democrat), and Scott.

As residents from New York City, Boston and other northeastern cities moved to more rural areas in the 1960s, young, left-leaning, outdoors-loving professionals were attracted to Vermont. This migration precipitated the shift in Vermont from one of the nation’s most solidly Republican states from 1856 to 1960 to one of its most Democratic, Dickinson said.

Despite Vermont going for the Democratic candidate in the past eight presidential elections, Douglas said he believes Vermont voters largely identify as independents. Vermonters do not officially register with a political party.

A lack of party registration and identification at the state level might make left-leaning Vermonters more open to electing a Republican governor, Dickinson said.

Another factor that perhaps worked to the benefit of Republicans such as Scott and Douglas is the shorter term length. At just two years, voters are more likely to give a candidate the benefit of the doubt, Douglas said. “[They figure] if we make a mistake, it’s not for long,” he said.

At the same time, as an outspoken critic of Trump, Scott has made an effort to stand apart from the national Republican Party. While there is a faction of Trump supporters in the state’s Republican Party, the Republicans who dominate the party in the state legislature are more moderate, Dickinson said.

Accordingly, Scott knows that he must work across the aisle with Democrats in the legislature to get things done, but is also willing to veto Democratic bills if legislators cannot come to an agreement. “It’s not like everything between him and the Democrats is hunky dory, but they both understand to get anything done they need to compromise with each other,” Dickinson said.

Scott gained considerable support among all Vermonters for his handling of the Covid-19 pandemic — he kept spending and tax rates down, while the state boasted high vaccination rates, a low case rate, and a low death rate. Scott has also been able to work with Democrats to pass a budget each year and to collaborate on passing tighter gun control laws.

Douglas said he believes the main change to the Vermont Republican Party since its creation is a decrease in its strength. The party has been divided between more moderate and conservative members since before the Democratic Party became competitive, he added.

“There has always been a big tent and different wings. The specifics have changed but it has always been quite diverse,” he said.

Looking ahead to next week’s election, Douglas said he doubts Scott will tally as high a percentage of the vote as the 2020 election, where he experienced widespread support for his handling of the pandemic. However, Douglas still expects Scott to win comfortably.

According to Douglas, Scott also hopes to win at least 51 Republican members (up from its current 46) in the House in order to have veto power. As of right now, Democrats and Progressives combined have a two-thirds majority to override Scott’s vetoes.

Douglas said he believes Vermonters keep an open mind when assessing candidates. “Vermonters jump around the ballot and make a decision in each race individually,” he said.

Senator Leahy retires, Welch and Malloy vie for Senate seat

By **AUDREY PEIKER**
Contributing Writer

Sen. Patrick Leahy has a 47-year history of representing Vermonters through his long-held seat in the U.S. Senate — a history which will come to an end during this upcoming midterm election. Current Vermont Representative Peter Welch appears to be the favorite to win Leahy’s vacant seat in next week’s election.

Leahy first sought office in 1974 and was elected as part of the “Watergate class” of Senators. Matt Dickinson, professor of political science, said that Leahy’s cohort of Democratic Senators gained their seats largely due to the backlash against the Watergate scandal. Leahy has now served a total of eight terms, making him Vermont’s longest-serving U.S. Senator and one of the longest-serving senators in U.S. history. Leahy announced his plans to retire last November, meaning that his time in office will come to an end once his current term is up.

According to Dickinson, Leahy initially took office at a time when Vermont was still predominantly a Republican state. Throughout his tenure, Leahy contributed to Vermont’s transition to a Democrat-dominated state, helping cement his legacy in state history.

“[Leahy has been a] national leader in things like pushing an anti-land mine initiative,” Dickinson told The Campus. “[He was] very instrumental in helping nominate judges who

leaned towards the left”.

Leahy gradually rose to prominence throughout his time in the Senate. He is currently the president pro tempore of the Senate, third in the line of presidential succession after the Vice President and Speaker of the House. Leahy is also chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, the most senior member of the Senate Judiciary Committee and a member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on State Department, Foreign Operations and Related Programs, according to his website.

“In that position as chair [of the Senate Appropriations Committee] he was instrumental at getting a number of projects developed,” Dickinson said.

Leahy ranks first in seniority of the Senate, meaning that his retirement will bring Vermont a significant loss of power in the Senate. Dickinson noted that Leahy adeptly wielded his seniority to bring resources back to Vermonters and to gain positions on powerful and relevant committees. Senators are given preferential treatment in choosing committee assignments based on seniority.

Leahy’s retirement presents a rare political opportunity, with one of Vermont’s two U.S. Senate seats vacant for the first time since Sen. Bernie Sanders’ election in 2006. Peter Welch, Vermont’s current representative in the U.S. House, announced his candidacy for Leahy’s seat in November 2021, shortly after Leahy spoke of his retirement.

According to his website, Representative Welch has served in the House since 2007. He is currently

the chief deputy whip for the House Democratic Caucus, a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, the Oversight and Reform Committee and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Dickinson said he has mixed feelings about Welch’s decision to leave the House of Representatives and make a bid for the Senate. With Senator Leahy’s retirement creating a significant loss of seniority within the Senate, Welch’s departure from the House for the Senate means another loss in seniority for Vermont’s House representation.

Dickinson said he understands Welch’s own perspective that Welch is likely the best positioned to win the Senate seat due to his experience in the House, and he also believes Welch is the most likely candidate to win the seat. “That doesn’t mean a woman with a state legislative experience couldn’t have run that seat, however,” Dickinson said.

Welch faces competition for the Senate seat from Republican Gerald Malloy. According to VTDigger, Malloy is a self-identified “conservative Republican” and said that he is pro life and against gun control. Malloy said in an interview that he wished he had been at the Capitol on Jan. 6, according to reporting from Seven Days.

Malloy’s victory in the Republican primary against Burlington’s Christina Nolan came as a surprise to many. Nolan outraised Malloy and received support from Vermont Governor Phil Scott, according to VTDigger. Nolan supports federal access to abortion and bipartisan gun reform, making her the more moderate of the two pri-

mary candidates.

Dickinson said he would describe Nolan as the candidate “handpicked” by the Republican Party, making her defeat more surprising. Nolan’s defeat and the victory of a more conservative candidate shows the “Trump-ification” of the Republican Party, even in states such as Vermont, Dickinson added.

When asked to predict how the Senate race between the two would go, Dickinson said he believes that the real race is the democratic primary in a blue state such as Vermont. “Peter Welch is a shoo-in for the Senate race,” he added.

If Welch is elected, Dickinson predicts that Welch would make a reliable vote for the Democratic Party. He likely would continue to advocate for his state and its interests, helping to represent Vermont’s priorities in Washington, D.C.

But Dickinson also noted that the committees which the victor is able to join will make a significant difference in his legislative abilities. While Welch would be able to transition some of his seniority from the House, he would still rank very low. Malloy would come in with no seniority. This means that either candidate might not be able to serve on their preferred committees, impacting the legislation they can enact.

The Senate election will occur with the other statewide and national elections on Nov. 8, 2022. Voter registration is available through election day, according to the Vermont Secretary of State’s website.

In support of a more effective Credit/No Credit option

Editorial

The editorial represents the opinion of the Middlebury Campus Editorial Board.

Trigger Warning: This article contains mentions of student death.

This Friday, Nov. 4, is the deadline to invoke or revoke Credit/No Credit (CR/NCR) as a grading option. The CR/NCR system has taken the place of the previous Pass/D/Fail option; students can opt to invoke this nonstandard grade twice during their four years at the college, for a single course during a semester at Middlebury. Though this choice bears the same name as the alternate grade mode extended to students during 2020 and 2021 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, it maintains the same restrictions — and shortcomings — as Pass/D/Fail.

The main discrepancy between the current CR/NCR option and Pass/D/Fail is that a student must receive a C- or above to receive credit, and a grade of “No Credit” will not affect a student’s GPA. While this change represents some additional leniency, it is ultimately too trivial to make a significant difference for students that are struggling.

The CR/NCR option as it currently stands is incredibly limited in scope in that it cannot be used for major, minor, academic distribution, college writing or cultures and civilizations requirements. (The only exception is that “in the case of a first course taken in a department or program in which a student subsequently declares a major or minor may, with the approval of the department chair or program director, count toward major or minor requirements.”)

This means that this option is often completely meaningless, as our editors noted that almost every class taken at Middlebury counts in one of these categories. While the model of our liberal arts education continuously touts the importance of trying new things, students often avoid taking courses they might be interested in if they know their grades might suffer. In practice, this looks like students opting to register for “easy” classes that they might not have any interest in to fulfill distribution requirements, instead of courses they genuinely want to take.

One of our editors with a background in dance noted how she took an introductory dance course to fulfill her ART requirement, even though she was more interested in a studio art course. However, studio art courses are known to be difficult, especially for those who are more artistically challenged, and the editor was worried that enrolling in one might tank her grade point average. Another editor noted taking several courses with the same professor because they knew exactly how the professor would grade.

Additionally, as Middlebury becomes more and more overenrolled and students cannot get into their first or second choice courses for a given requirement or elective, they are ending up in courses where they



SUSANNA SCHATZ

may need extra leniency. For one of our editors, limited seats in upper-level language classes and the limitations of the current CR/NCR policy could present roadblocks to meeting pre-abroad requirements.

These sorts of issues demonstrate how the current system is, in many scenarios, essentially useless. We as a board do not believe that having an expanded and more liberal CR/NCR — like in previous semesters — would jeopardize students’ learning or retention. In fact, we think it will allow students to feel more comfortable branching out and exploring all that Middlebury’s course catalog has to offer.

These are not novel ideas — in fact, many professors have already instituted effort-based grading or “ungrading” in their own classrooms. In a story published in 2021, Biology Professor Greg Pask said of his labor-based grading structure that “the biggest benefit is that students are learning for themselves, they’re exploring this topic of our class for their own interests.” Computer Science Professor Shelby Kimmel said that “my goal is to give the students a bit more structure to help guide their learning, while also encouraging students to view learning as a process that requires time and effort and where mistakes are part of that process.”

While it is refreshing to see more and more professors embrace nontraditional grading systems, the onus cannot solely be on individual faculty members to change the culture of letter-based grades.

Additionally, some nontraditional grading systems revolve around students selecting their own grade — a process which is proven to disproportionately penalize female students who often critique their work more harshly than their male counterparts.

Many faculty, on the other hand, strongly oppose the idea of an expanded CR/NCR option. The most common rationale for this is that it would lead students to work less hard and skimp on assignments. However, it is evident that some faculty members experimenting with new systems believe that decentering grades actually heightens learning.

Another concern posed about alternate grades is that traditional letter grades can serve as an equalizer, with the idea being that no matter what background a student is coming from, they have the chance to achieve the same grades as their more privileged peers. However, this perspective overlooks the very different circumstances students experience while at Middlebury. Someone who works twenty hours a week through federal work study is not going to be able to study the same amount as someone who doesn’t need a job to pay tuition or make ends meet. In addition, students who came from prep schools explicitly designed to funnel students into elite colleges do not exist on an even playing field with students who did not have access to these resources before Middlebury.

Other professors worry that alter-

nate grading will foster the idea that the only acceptable grade is an A, leading students to invoke CR/NCR for any class they cannot receive the top mark in. While we agree that a 4.0 transcript comprising a myriad of “Credit” grades probably doesn’t set the best precedent, the reality is that many Middlebury students already perceive grades below an A or A- as having a negative connotation. The sort of “morally superior” rhetoric expressing that students “need to be OK with Bs” and “learn that grades don’t determine your worth” ignores the reality that our transcripts have very real ramifications post-Middlebury.

Grad school applications aside, some employers maintain a GPA cutoff — and we haven’t heard of any student who hasn’t had to disclose their grades when receiving pre-med advising from Health Professions and Science Advising staff. Ultimately, imploring students to look beyond their grades ignores the role grades play in students’ ability to make a living, pay off their loans or support family members financially. Many outside scholarships also require that students maintain a certain GPA minimum, putting students’ abilities to attend college at all at the mercy of professors’ grading. While we too wish that grades didn’t matter, that is not the world we live in right now.

Therefore, we believe it is critical to rethink the current CR/NCR system in order to provide students with a safety net when they need it the most. In addition to how stu-

dents’ course selection is limited by grade anxiety, students need a valid option in the case of an emergency. Taking an incomplete in a course can be difficult to get approved but also often requires students to draw out their semester by weeks or months — sometimes overlapping with the start of a new term. In addition, dropping a course either at week eight or via late drop leaves students with an additional credit to make up, meaning they will likely need to take five classes in a future semester.

However, because the ability for students to invoke CR/NCR is so limited, many are finding themselves preparing to drop a course this term. Because both the drop and the CR/NCR deadline are this Friday, many students are making this decision based on one or two assignments they have received back. This timeline is especially illogical considering some professors are notorious for intentionally giving poor grades on midterms in a misguided attempt to have students work harder in the back half of the semester.

Last fall, after the death of a Middlebury student, faculty voted to reinstate the Covid-19 version of CR/NCR. While we greatly appreciate this gesture, we do not believe that support for students should be reactive — as in it should not take a horrible tragedy to extend grace and flexibility to the student body. Rather, options like CR/NCR must be proactively expanded so that students have this option in their back pocket should they end up needing it.

Middlebury can also look to other higher education institutions for inspiration. For instance, Wellesley College has a mandatory “shadow grading” system in which nonstandard grades are listed for all courses taken within students’ first semester in order to “refocus attention from grades to intellectual engagement and inspiration and to learn how to grow as a learner in college.” In addition to the first semester, Wellesley students have the option of “taking an unlimited number of units on a Credit/Non-Credit grading basis.”

At Williams College, students can invoke their Pass/Fail option up until one week after grades for the semester are due, which provides students with more time and information to make this decision. At Amherst College, students can use Pass/Fail for any courses besides their first year seminar. At Brown University, well known for its nontraditional grading, students can choose to take any course for a grade of “A,B,C/No Credit or Satisfactory/No Credit.”

At the end of the day, we hope that faculty will consider moving towards a system that has more utility for students. We are not asking to do away with letter grades completely, rather, we are recognizing how the current system is ineffective and does little to mediate pre-existing inequities. An opt-in CR/NCR system that could be invoked closest to the end of the semester for courses that fulfill graduation requirements would go a long way in helping students to take intellectual risks and engage in new fields of study.

Sex Panther: Let’s talk about hookup culture

COLUMN

Sex Panther

own at Middlebury. It is not only accepted, but often encouraged, to leave an Atwater suite with a stranger or acquaintance. Despite the small student population, and the almost assured morning-after run-in with last night’s lover in a dining hall, many of us students still seek the thrill of uninhibited sexual encounters.

This culture of casual hookups

is neither “good” nor “bad” and it certainly should not be shamed. For those who choose to partake in such culture, power to you! As long as you’re staying safe and maintaining consent (which is freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic and specific), you do you! Where hookup culture goes wrong at Middlebury is in the blurred lines induced by sub-

stances and assumed consent to sex. Going home with a stranger is not necessarily an invitation to sex unless each partner enthusiastically consents to it. If you’re hooking up with multiple partners, use protection and get tested for STIs.

For those who prefer consistency and emotional connection, Middlebury’s social scene can be

a challenging and isolating place. Resisting passes made at you might feel demoralizing and tiring. You may feel the need to justify your choices to friends whose misplaced sympathies are directed at your “barren” love life. Perhaps you hooked up with someone the week before, assuming it would become something deeper, but are still awaiting a response to your text. You may have listened to a podcast that declared hookup culture to be “empowering” and are wondering why you don’t feel so empowered right now. I get it. Casual hookups are not for everyone! Chances are you’re not the only one of your friends who feels that way.

If it’s any solace, you are neither disempowered for avoiding a one-night stand nor are you disempowered for indulging in one! It’s about time we stop passing moral judgment on sexual behavior. As long as you are doing what makes you feel fulfilled and safe, you’re doing it right.



THEA VOLPP

Crossing the threshold into action: How Middlebury can do more this election

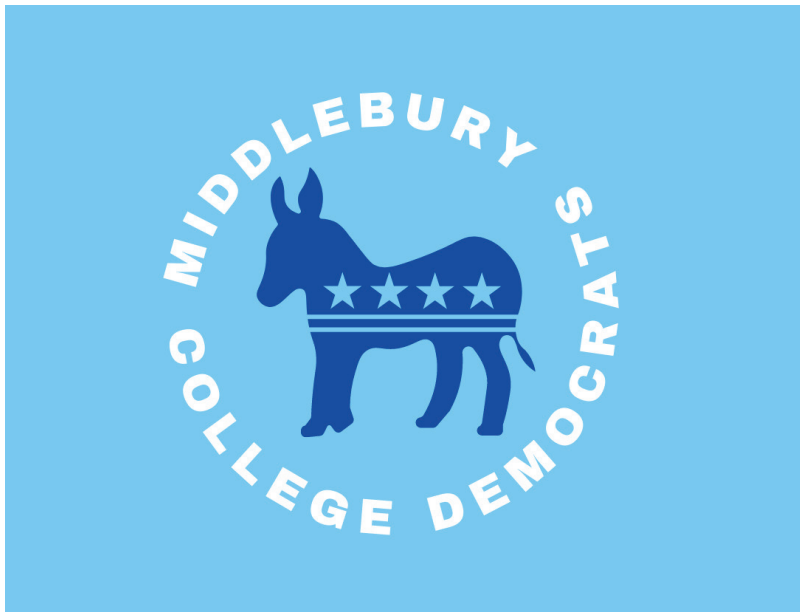
Op-ed

Maggie Bryan and Freddi Mitchell are co-presidents of Middlebury College Democrats and members of the class of 2025.

Middlebury College values students' civic engagement. The community prides itself in having the second-highest voter registration rate of all US colleges during the 2018 and 2020 elections. Many students have well-formed opinions about modern issues crafted in classrooms, club meetings and conversations with friends. Yet we recognize that some Middlebury students condemn bi-partisan politics and despite their strong values, are uninterested in participating in the two-party system. Understanding politics and crafting opinions is hardly productive if students don't take concrete action towards them.

The progressive values at the center of our community, particularly reproductive justice and climate action will not become a reality if students do not vote for Democratic candidates at the local, state and national level.

In July, the Supreme Court's Dobbs v. Jackson decision left a mark on the Middlebury community. Since then, Middlebury students have rallied on the local level to codify abortion rights into law. Recently, we hosted a rally in support of Article 22, a ballot measure which would codify abortion rights in the Vermont Constitution. This amendment would not only have local impacts, but would be revolutionary on a national scale. Although we all call Vermont home during the school year, many Middlebury students live in states where total bans on abortion have already gone into effect since



Dobbs v. Jackson. More students live in states with legislatures which could pass total abortion bans, if Republicans win a majority in November.

Similarly to their passions for reproductive justice, many Middlebury students are vocal about their passion for environmental issues. Environmental values of outdoor recreation and climate awareness are what draw many to Middlebury in the first place. Energy 2028 signs, stickers and posters are proudly displayed, students opt for vegetarian, low-impact diets and climate anxiety is a term used in day-to-day conversation. These values, however, are too often left on campus. Middlebury's environmentalism must manifest itself in tangible political action.

This summer, President Joe Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), allocating an unprecedented \$369 billion towards fighting the climate crisis, into law. This fall, our nation saw devastating hurricanes strike Puerto Rico and Florida, a reminder of how deeply we need the IRA, and

more.

Yet, if Republicans win a majority in the House of Representatives next week, it's possible the House will weaken the IRA by investigating sources of funding and making grants more restrictive which would effectively mute several of the legislation's important impacts. On a local level, elected officials in towns and cities throughout the country will have the power to decide how the IRA takes effect in their communities. Republican legislators are thus less likely to invest in local sustainable infrastructure funded by the Act and less likely to pursue the competitive renewable energy grants it offers. For that reason, voting for environmentally conscious candidates from the top to the bottom of the ballot carries significant weight for our future.

Because the future of our planet and reproductive rights are on the line Nov. 8, we must turn out in record numbers for Democratic candidates that support these issues. Eighteen- to 24-year-olds have the lowest voter

turnout of any age group in the U.S. We know that generational change in our government is required to solve issues of reproductive justice, the climate crisis and the many other issues we face as a nation. In order to see this change, though, young people must vote. We cannot continue to argue for change unless we take action to see this change as well.

To those who have already voted, in person or by absentee ballot, we thank you for your civic engagement. For those who haven't, it's not too late. If you've received an absentee ballot, educate yourself on local, state and national candidates and then send it back as soon as possible. If you weren't able to request or receive a ballot, you can still vote in Middlebury at the Recreation Center from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Nov. 8, thanks to Vermont's same day registration policy.

If you've voted and feel compelled to do more, College Democrats hosts multiple weekly phone banks for Senate candidates in swing states. We urge you to phone bank or text bank with us. If you'd like to do so on your own time, it can take as little as five minutes to set up on Activate America, a website with dozens of phone banks to choose from with times to fit any schedule. Take advantage of the opportunities that come with living in a small community: attend rallies, meet local candidates and educate yourself on local issues.

No matter the outcome of this election, it is essential to stay involved: stay informed, hold elected officials accountable to their campaign promises and keep pressuring them to do more.

Editor's Note: Maggie Bryan '25 is an Arts & Culture Editor for The Campus.

The opinions expressed are those of individual students, and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Middlebury Campus or Middlebury College.

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ELECTION-THEMED CROSSWORD

By **JOSH HARKINS**
Contributing Writer

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FROM THE POLLING PLACE TO THE MAILBOX: STUDENTS CONSIDER THE IMPORTANCE OF VOTING

By **CHARLIE KEOHANE**
Editor at Large

With midterm elections around the corner, many students are in the process of filling out their ballots and mailing them to county offices around the country. For some students, particularly out-of-state students, attitudes toward voting have changed since coming to Middlebury.

For some, voting in college means voting by mail from their dorm room instead of at a polling place. This was a change for Per Alexander ’24.5, who was home for the 2020 election and voted in person, a process he really enjoyed.

“I love voting in person,” Alexander said. “When we had the primaries over the summer, it was so nice to walk to the polling place. It feels like a community and a neighborhood. Everyone is there going through it. It’s very fun to see everyone out.”

On the other hand, Eva Kaiden ’23 has always voted absentee, since she turned 18 the summer before starting college. Kaiden, a New York City resident, felt like voting absentee meant she had to be more organized.

“I have the need to be super proactive in ordering my ballot and getting it in on time. Especially these midterms, which are a little more hotly contested in New York than any other election I’ve really voted in besides the presidential [election]. So, I think because of that, I felt more pressure to request my ballot earlier,” Kaiden said.

For Alexander, voting by mail feels like less of a communi-

ty-building experience.

“It definitely makes it more of a task to accomplish and less of an exciting opportunity,” he said. “But it was pretty easy to request my absentee ballot.”

Since moving to Vermont, Sofia West ’23 has reconsidered the power of her vote.

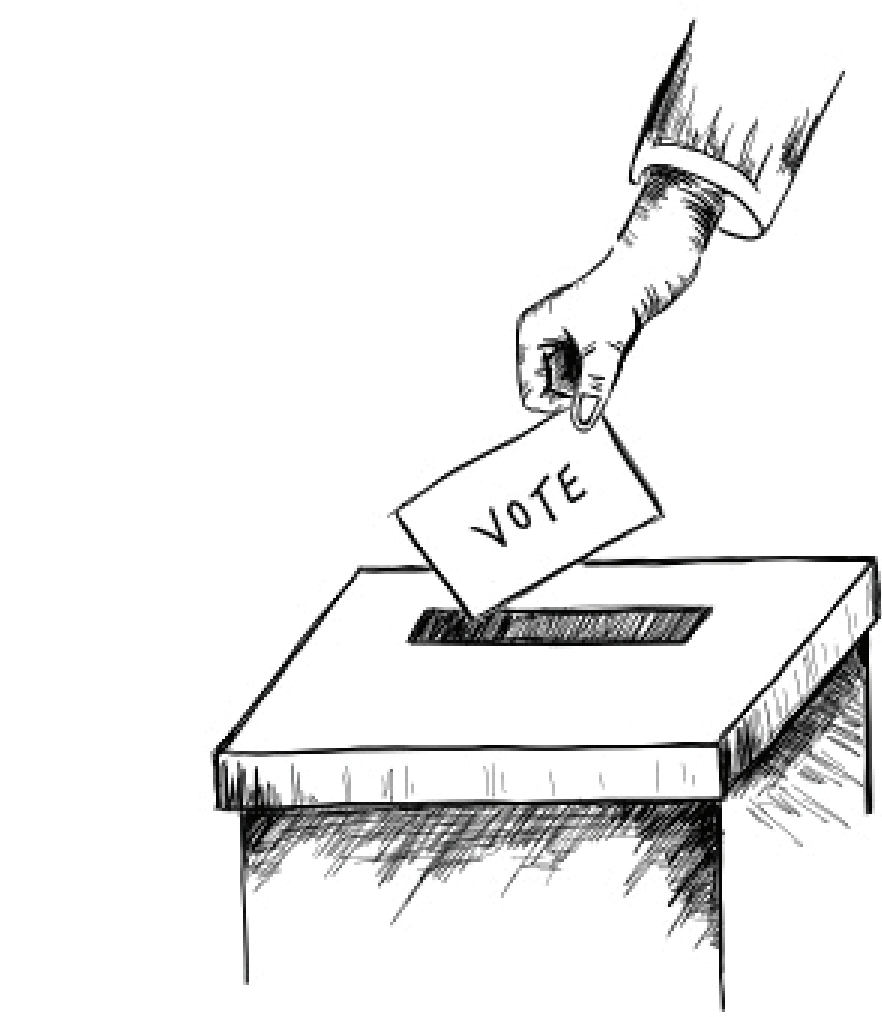
“I have felt more intentional with and in control of my vote,” West said. “Since living in Vermont, I have the option of voting either in Vermont or my home state of California, and depending on the election, I can vote wherever I think my ballot will have the stronger impact.”

While thinking about where her ballot can have maximum impact, West has grown increasingly interested in local elections.

“Dialogue between my family about voting has always been fairly transparent, but recently they have strongly urged me to vote in my hometown because of the tight races in the school district and county,” West said. “Despite now living thousands of miles away, I am still naturally connected to my home. And while I do not need further encouragement to vote, doing my part to contribute politically is important to me.”

Mary Nagy-Benson ’24.5 is a Vermont resident and felt glad that she was able to vote on local issues, especially issues she is passionate about.

“Although Vermont is already a blue state, there are still items on the ballot that I care a lot about,” Nagy-Benson said. “There was a question on the ballot about adding an article to Vermont’s constitution about reproductive justice which is designed to deny the possibility of anti-choice legislation being passed by the Vermont legislature at some point in the future. Reproductive justice is a huge issue for me, and I was glad



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to use my vote as my voice to support this amendment in Vermont (which as of now has the right to abortions) that aims to protect it in the future.”

Kaiden also believes that voting is important even if you think your vote doesn’t matter in a state that strongly leans one way or another.

“I think sometimes in really blue states you can get kind of lost in the idea that your vote doesn’t matter that much, but the idea that my vote might actually really matter in the election for Governor of New York made me kind of excited and that my vote matters, and that I should really get on top of it,” Kaiden said.

For Alexander, voting as a college student holds extra weight because it is a key way of influencing future policy.

“We have an opportunity to shape our own future in a way that’s different for people who are

The Choral Chameleon Ensemble brings calm energy to campus

By **ELIZA KING FREEDMAN**
Senior Arts & Culture Editor

Choral Chameleon, a semi-professional New York City-based chorus, joined Bloom Holistic Healing, a wellness organization, for an immersive “washing” experience at Robison Concert Hall, Oct. 28. As the audience took seats, healers walked around the room with various bowls and chimes, welcoming the audience with a calm energy that is nearly the opposite of the usual buzz that accompanies the start of a show.

This alternative energy was entirely intentional on the parts of both Choral Chameleon and Bloom, as it was intended to welcome audiences back to concerts and public spaces after the isolation of Covid-19.

“We were concerned that when audiences came back to formal concerts that they might find that experience immediately overwhelming after having been so isolated for two years... The idea behind this was, ‘How can we reunite with our listeners in a way that was gentle, mindful and holistic?’” explained Choral Chameleon Artistic Director Vince Peterson.

This mindset was potent throughout the performance. Following the unique welcoming of the audience, Peterson began the show by saying “you are safe, you are held and we ask you to let go.” From there, audience members were encouraged to put on eye masks for the duration of the show, allowing themselves to focus on the sensations that would accompany the choral music alongside the sounds of the healing instruments.

As a reflection of the sound bath’s intentional uniqueness, the Choral Chameleon choir, which has never been tied to tradition, performed a nuanced version of traditional choir music. Choir music usually has religious connotations and is rooted in classical music — often making words hard to understand or lyrics overall unrelatable. Choral Chameleon, however, takes a different approach wherein its composers arrange

pieces in the style of traditional choir music (i.e.: the style that makes a group of people’s voices sound like one big instrument) but adds lyrics drawn from contemporary music. This creative process allows the choir to blend with the sound bath instruments, as choir-members sang about love and connections to Earth and the inner-self.

“The chorus played a variety of songs which helped foster a space of deep relaxation for me and others in the audience. I was struck by the palpable change in atmosphere after the final song was performed, like the audience was coming out of a trance,” said concert-goer Alex Stimpson ’23-5.

When asked if it was their first sound bath, at least three-quarters of the audience raised their hands. Despite fears of falling asleep, by the end of the show it was clear that everyone in the room had been emotionally moved. The performance ended with audience-members taking off their eye masks and being asked to say “ahh” all together three times. And while each chant was moving, the final chant came with the request that each person let out whatever stress or energy they had brought with them, and, without any of the usual “I can’t hear you”s that come with the awkwardness of audience participation, everybody sang out together for about 60 seconds.

“This is not just a musical performance, it’s a transformance. When you receive sound healing in a sound bath, you don’t just listen to it with your ears, every cell in your body is receiving vibrations and frequency... We know from science that every time you give your nervous system the opportunity to switch from ‘flight or fight’ to ‘rest and restore,’ you are giving your body the ability to do what it does naturally, which is finally come to a state of balance,” sound healer Isabelle Pierre-Emile said.

The uniqueness of this performance and the way that the audience was expected to receive it were reasons that Director for the Performing Arts Series Allison Coyne Carroll was so excited to host the choir. “Choral Chameleon is a really forward-thinking ensemble. And now that the [performing arts] series is in its second century, it’s a nice energy to have an ensemble



COURTESY PHOTO

As the audience took seats, healers walked around the room with various bowls and chimes.

here that is really looking toward the future,” Coyne Carroll said.

Though it may sound quite daunting to attend a 90-minute performance blindfolded, this joint effort by Choral Chameleon and Bloom was not to be missed — and would have been nearly impossible to doze off to. The sounds of the healing instruments were relaxing and the choir enveloped the crowd in a communal and lov-

ing experience that was only added to by the talent of the performers.

“This experience is an opportunity for everyone to reconnect with themselves and reconnect with everyone in the room. So much of what we’re missing right now is community, and specifically healing from the last few years in community, together again,” reflected Bloom sound healer and Choral Chameleon member Molly

Rabuffo.

And if this article has made you regret having missed such a relaxing and moving show — not to worry! Choral Chameleon will be returning for a residency with the Middlebury Choir come spring 2023, and though they will not be accompanied by Bloom, there is no doubt that their performances will be both talent-infused and musically unique.

STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS SHARE ELECTION NIGHT RITUALS

By **MAGGIE BRYAN**
Arts & Culture Editor

Every two years, millions of politically concerned Americans huddle around televisions, cell phones and radios, patiently awaiting the results of midterm or presidential elections. It’s a process that ends in celebration for some, tears for others and confusion for many. For members of the Middlebury community, this year’s elections mean many things. Some people are creating new traditions: voting for the first time, spending their first election overseas or finding new ways to celebrate because of sore memories associated with old rituals. Others are taking part in older traditions that have stood the tests of the Covid-19 pandemic and political turmoil.

Norah Santoni de Castro ’26 is a first-time voter in this election. Santoni de Castro was born in Miami and grew up in the Dominican Republic. Despite living abroad, she has always followed U.S. politics closely and has looked forward to voting this year. At home, Santoni de Castro’s election night ritual was to watch the results come in with her family, while calling friends in the U.S. This year, the roles are reversed. She expects to be watching the results with friends in the U.S. with her family on the phone.

“It honestly doesn’t feel as different, because I’ll still just be watching the news, but it does feel a little bit more ‘real.’ This time around the choices are directly impacting me, as I’m living in the States right now, and it’s not just happening in another country,”

Santoni de Castro said.

Lea Hohenlohe ’24 is currently studying abroad in Madrid. Hohenlohe is a double major in political science and philosophy, and last year she was president of College Democrats. Naturally, she considers herself an avid election follower. Yet in Spain, under Middlebury’s language pledge, she hasn’t been able to listen to news spoken in English and is thus finding it more difficult to keep up with the election. She has also found that Americans abroad aren’t as interested in talking about the election, and she doesn’t get the sense that many of her American peers plan to vote via absentee ballot. Despite being thousands of miles away and six hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, Hohenlohe still plans to take part in her favorite election night ritual, clicking through The New York Times graphics that project likely winners in each state.

Bill McKibben, author, activist and Schumann Distinguished Scholar in Environmental Studies at Middlebury, spends much of his time advocating for climate policy on a national and international scale. As a result, elections carry significant weight for him personally and for his cause. Despite the frequent travel demanded by his role, McKibben’s election night tradition remained fairly consistent until recent years.

“When our daughter Sophie was smaller, she would draw a big map of the U.S. and then fill in the states red or blue as results came in. It was good fun, until 2016, when it was so unbearably sad that the party broke up in tears and everyone went home. Not sure we’ll ever do it quite like that again,” McKibben said.

In spite of shifting politics and Covid-19 levels, some have man-



COURTESY OF MATT DICKINSON

Dickinson hosts a viewing event in Crossroads Cafe each election night.

aged to maintain steady traditions over the past several elections. Matt Dickinson is a political science professor specializing in elections and the presidency. Each election night, Dickinson and fellow political science professor Bert Johnson co-host a viewing event in Crossroads Café, where students and community members are welcome to congregate and watch as election results flow in.

Yet Dickinson has many other roles on election night. In addition to his duties as professor and election night co-host, Dickinson typically appears on local television to offer commentary and punditry, while also updating his Twitter

and blog. Logistically, this routine is slightly complicated. Dickinson described how his student research assistant sits next to him onstage and keeps track of returns as they come in, while he does on-the-spot analysis.

This year, he has been requested to appear on local news stations on election night, which means he may have to miss the Crossroads viewing party, or be recorded from Crossroads and appear on television every half hour. “As long as I’m not plied with alcohol,” Dickinson joked.

Considered by many to be overproduced and at times theatrical, election night may actually play a

role in strengthening our democracy. Gathering in community is proven to increase civic engagement. Celebrating election night with others may also play a role in holding election officials accountable. Dickinson reflected on election night as a reminder of the ways in which power still rests with the people. “I think getting together as a reminder of that is an important ritual that does promote this sense of civic virtue,” Dickinson said.

Editor’s Note: Maggie Bryan ’25 is the current co-president of the Middlebury College Democrats.

“FREEDOM DREAMING” IMAGINES AN ANTI-RACIST MIDDLEBURY

By RAIN JI
Managing Editor

What would an anti-racist Middlebury look like? “Freedom Dreaming,” a staged reading directed by Tara Affolter, associate professor of Education Studies, interrogated ways in which Middlebury could follow a path of anti-racism in classrooms on Oct. 28 and 29 at the Mahaney Arts Center Dance Theatre.

Onstage, seven actors dressed in their everyday outfits as they read and acted out lines sewn together from interviews conducted with predominantly BIPOC students on campus. The simple stage setup made it easier for audiences to immerse themselves in the words of the actors. With only black blocks for actors to sit or stand on and simple background visuals, the show skillfully painted experiences of marginalization and isolation of students of color on campus.

Meili Huang ’23 played Alice in the show, and although she was not personally interviewed for the compilation of the production, she saw resemblance between her lines and her lived experiences.

“Representation is that feeling when you see someone on stage, who looks like you, saying the things that you feel everyday on campus,” Huang said. “It’s crucial to be able to start asking those very difficult questions.”

Laura Rivera Martinez ’23, who played the role of Olaya, echoed the sentiment.

“I can relate to my character’s lines in many ways, like the idea of how professors can do harm but also be agents of change and drivers of anti-racist work in the classrooms,” Rivera Martinez said.

“Freedom Dreaming” found the perfect balance between casualness and seriousness.

In between scenes, actors danced to music curated by Malachi Raymond ’24. “I tried to capture the duality of facing systems of oppression [...] highlighting both the struggles and liberations that can come from it,” Raymond said.

The show balanced both humorous revelations about ridiculous racist incidents inside classrooms and weighty perspectives that question the deep-rooted racism in higher-education institutions and the way that they teach, from academic journals that refer to Black people just as “Blacks” to biology classes not mentioning the historical medical abuse of Black people.

In a cast predominantly made up of BIPOC students, Ben Knudsen ’23 played the role of Lucas, the only white character.

“Freedom Dreaming” was provocative in that it forced discomfort within every single audience member.

Reflecting on his role, Knudsen pointed out that Lucas is representative of those students and professors who are unaware of their own whiteness and the effects that their ignorance and acts of racism have on students of color.

“Freedom Dreaming” was provocative in that it forced discomfort within every single audience member. Actors asked audiences to join them in imagining a Middlebury that is committed to anti-racism. Audience members’ responses, written on notecards and collected during the show, were read out loud in between lines, prompting organic engage-



COURTESY OF TODD BALFOUR

Laura Rivera Martinez ’23 played the role of Olaya.



COURTESY OF TODD BALFOUR

Charice Lawrence ’23 explained how they turned interviews into a cohesive script.



COURTESY OF TODD BALFOUR

Director Tara Affolter discussing her hope for the future of antiracism at Middlebury.



COURTESY OF TODD BALFOUR

Ben Knudsen ’23 played the role of Lucas, the only white character.

ment and spontaneity in the production.

The show impressed Senna Gardner ’24 because it proposed actionable steps and ideas that would make Middlebury a more inclusive and safe space for students of color, such as requiring professors to indicate how their course specifically relates to anti-racism work.

“Anti-racism is an active process and that should be reflected in every curriculum across all departments,” Gardner said.

Affolter and Research Team Leader Charice Lawrence ’23 first conceived of the piece in January 2021, when they wondered what an anti-racist Middlebury would look like, sound like and feel like for students of color in an academic setting. The team interviewed more than 60 students, mostly students of color, and created scripts solely based on the interview transcripts.

Unfortunately, because of a Covid-19 outbreak on campus at the end of the semester, the production was canceled after the night of the final dress rehearsal. But in July 2022, the facilitators of the show began to recruit a new cast to bring back the production.

Affolter and Lawrence recruited their cast almost entirely through word of mouth. “[The actors] chose to be a part of this cast because of their freedom, dreams, hope and drive to push Middlebury on an antiracist path,” Affolter wrote in the director’s note.

Stage Manager Evelyn Magdaleno ’24 first learned about the production last year when she was enrolled in the class “Culturally Responsive Policy and Pedagogy” with Affolter. During the past summer, she was invited to join the crew by Affolter and accepted it because she aspires to be an educator.

Grace Mtunguja ’26 was initially hesitant to join the play because she had little experience acting. But after she learned more about the concept of freedom dreaming from Affolter, who also is her first year seminar professor, she decided to join the production. “I think this kind of work always needs to continue happening [...] when people actually start

conversing, we will learn how to make a more just, inclusive and equal community,” Mtunguja said.

The cast began rehearsals in late September. Because of the shortened timeline, Affolter and

“We really see ‘Freedom Dreaming’ as an entry point or a place to continue the work of antiracism.”

Lawrence opted for a simplified version of the original production.

“It was a much more honest version of the script, even though it looked less of a professional production,” Lawrence said. “I genuinely really liked the actors having their books, because it reminds you that these are just students. It bleeds into the realness of it because, at the end of the day, the theater production is just a pathway into this information.”

The show left a complexity of emotions in audience members, be it anger or sorrow. But it ended on a hopeful note, encouraging faculty and students to work toward anti-racism.

“In addition to highlighting the struggle, I hope today’s show also points out possibilities,” Affolter said in her concluding remarks at the end of the show.

Organizers of the production are offering workshops to academic departments around the themes that emerged from the interviews.

“We really see ‘Freedom Dreaming’ as an entry point or a place to continue the work of anti-racism,” Affolter said. “This is ongoing work that requires humility and willingness to engage in powerful and sometimes difficult conversations. We hope faculty and staff join us on this journey.”

PFL Weekly

By COLE SIEFER, DAN UR-CHUK, BEN WAGNER & SAM MCGARRAHAN
Podcast Hosts

Football improves to 6–1 with a thrilling last-minute touchdown drive. The PFL co-hosts catch up with Dave Filias '25, a dominant edge rusher, to discuss double teams, persistence and the importance of excellent coaching. Men's soccer snags a 2–0 win over Hamilton as Ryan Grady '23 records another shut-

out, and prepares to face Amherst in a semi-final matchup at Williams next weekend. Field hockey beats the Ephs in a home quarterfinal matchup, and will host the NESCAC Championship next weekend. Women's soccer falls 2–1 against Trinity in a quarterfinal game and awaits an NCAA bid determination. Volleyball goes 1–1 through the week, currently ranked #6 in the NESCAC, starting the NESCAC tournament on Nov. 4 against Williams. Men's cross country comes in third in the NESCAC meet, and looks forward to the NCAA regional championship next weekend. It's a great week to be a Panther!



COURTESY OF CAROLINE HARDING

REMEMBERING BUTCH VARNO



COURTESY PHOTO

Butch Varno during a football halftime ceremony.

By JACK MCGUIRE
Sports Editor

Butch Varno, a lifelong resident of the town of Middlebury and a dear part of the Middlebury athletics community, passed away on Oct. 14. He was 75.

Varno ingratiated himself in the Middlebury sports community in 1960 when he was just 13 years old. Varno — who had cerebral palsy — was coming home from a Middlebury football game with his grandmother, who was struggling to push Varno's wheelchair through the snow. Roger Ralph '63, a student at the time, saw Varno and his grandmother struggling in the snow, and Ralph offered them a ride home.

Since Ralph first picked up Butch in 1960, Middlebury sports teams have continued the meaningful tradition of "picking up Butch." Members of Middlebury's basketball and football teams have driven to Butch's house and picked him up for more than 60 years, making sure that one of their most loyal and dedicated fans was always in the stands for their games.

Attending almost every Middlebury sports game, Varno developed a passion for Middlebury sports. He would always complain about being inside doing things like playing bingo; being around places like the football team is where he found joy, according to Margaux Eller '24, an intern on "Butch's Team," a community engagement organization that visited him on a weekly basis as well as organizing special events in his honor.

Butch's fandom for Middlebury sports went beyond traditional boundaries that separate a fan from a team. Not only did he attend nearly every game he could, but he came to know

the teams he watched on a personal level, player by player.

"He would always talk as if he was part of the teams, saying that he helped with recruitment for the players," Eller said. "I think that just showed that he felt like he's part of the team and, equally, that all the team members felt like he was an important member of their team."

Butch was beloved by the athletes he supported and the people around him, and he brought enormous joy and positivity to the Middlebury community as a whole.

"[His] smile and his laugh are just so infectious that I just remember how that one to two hours out of my day [spent with Butch] could have that much of an impact on his happiness," Eller said.

In the past few years, Covid-19 restrictions limited Butch's ability to go to his beloved Middlebury sports games and reduced his interactions with the rest of the community. However, through his support team, he was still able to connect with other members of the community, and as Covid-19 restrictions loosened, he got back to watching Middlebury sports and being picked up by Middlebury athletes.

Even outside of watching Middlebury athletics, Butch had a deep connection with the school. Through his aforementioned support team, he interacted with a wide range of students by doing things like going on walks, visiting different parts of town and just simply having conversations.

"[Through Butch's Team], I soon realized that [Butch] kind of became a member of my Middlebury family," Eller said. "He was just so personable, bringing so much joy and laughter into everyone's life."

CAPTAIN'S CORNER: KATIE MURPHY '23, WOMEN'S GOLF



COURTESY OF KATIE MURPHY

Katie Murphy '23 drives the ball from the first tee box at Ralph Myhre Golf Course.

By CAPTAIN RUDOLPH
Staff Writer

Welcome to this week's installment of Captain's Corner, where I sit down with a captain of a Middlebury College athletics team to talk Captain to captain about the role, the team and their life at Middlebury. This week I got a chance to chat with Katie Murphy '23 about the team's fall success and how they are preparing for NESCAC Championships this coming spring. Katie has led the team to some impressive finishes in tournaments this fall, utilizing her strong performances to motivate the team to greater success.

Captain Rudolph: How did the fall season go for the team? What does that mean for the spring season?

Katie Murphy: So, as a team, we started out pretty hot. At Hamilton, everyone played really well, and I think we stayed competitive throughout the entire semester. We were kind of head to head but also sitting right behind Williams and Amherst. They're normally the best two schools going after it, and we gave them a good run for their money a few times throughout this season. We had four tournaments and a NESCAC qualifier that was hosted in Amherst. The winner of that qualifier gets to host the top four finishing teams in a battle for the NESCAC Championship in the spring. We came in third, which was very exciting to stay in a good position within the conference, and we stepped up on the second day of the qualifier by posting some great scores that were way better than the first day. That ended

up being a great way to end the fall season on a strong note.

CR: What is your favorite hole on the Ralph Myhre Golf Course? Why?

KM: Hole 15 is the best because it's definitely pretty challenging. Throughout my first two years playing the course, I could not get it right. From the tee box, I would hit my ball out of bounds right almost every time. The hazard over there is brutal. But I just love how the drive is challenging and how the approach shot is at a pretty solid angle, and the green is always fun but nothing too hard. I think it's just a nice fun but kind of hard hole. Not to mention, it has a phenomenal view of the Green Mountains in the fall.

CR: How do you fill your role as a captain when golf is such an individually focused sport?

KM: This is definitely something that I've had to learn how to navigate throughout this last year. I think it's an incredibly important role because golf is an individual sport, but it's necessary for people to be rooting for each other so that it doesn't feel like we are out there playing alone. So, it's important to keep that team dynamic strong when there are 14 people trying to qualify for five spots. Thankfully, our dynamic is full of cheering each other on as we ride the highs but also being supportive in the lows, as golf can be so volatile from week to week. Making sure everyone is embracing that culture is one of the roles I've taken on as [a] captain for sure — and making sure people show up to practice on time.

CR: Do you have any rituals before or while playing a round of golf?

KM: Yeah, I do. I'll do the same 15 minute peloton stretching workout and five minute ab workout before every match, and then I'll play Cage the Elephant's "Social Cues" album on repeat my entire warm up because it's the only music I can listen to that makes me feel like I'm in the zone. And, as a pre-shot routine, every time, that includes one quarter-half practice swing and is followed by three twirls of my club as I walk up to the ball. It just helps a lot to be consistent every time.

CR: When the golf course is covered in snow during the winter, how do y'all find ways to stay on top of your game?

KM: Just this last spring, we officially got a simulator that's in the squash courts right now. It's a pretty sweet setup, however I've only been to it a couple times because the weather is so nice, and I definitely want to take every chance I can to be outside right now. As winter approaches, we'll start going there a couple times a week in small groups. We also lift three times a week and try to get some yoga in as well. During the offseason we're pretty much just trying to work on our strength training, flexibility and using the simulator to look at our numbers.

CR: What's your favorite iron to hit with?

KM: I love my six iron. I probably hit it the most because as the cold approaches in the fall, the courses we play aren't that long, but they start feeling long. So I use my six iron to keep it a little low in the wind, and it's always consistent. I can always trust that baby!

Editor's Note: This interview has been lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

XC teams compete in NESCAC Championships

team can be proud of.

"After our race last week, we had some things we wanted to work on going forward," said Audrey Grimes '23, who finished 26th overall. "We wanted to trust our teammates, run as a team and push to the absolute max, and we stepped up in all those aspects."

Morgane Orcutt '25 was the first to finish the course, stopping the clock at a fast 22:42 for 25th place. Grimes finished right behind her in 22:44, beating a handful of rivals in the final sprint. Team Captain Kate Kenny '23, Kate Ratcliffe '25 and Lucca Franz '26

scored for the Panthers with 40, 44 and 46 points, respectively. Tatum Peskin '24 and Josie Dolan '26 completed the team's top seven, snatching valuable points away from their competition.

"We did a really good job running as a pack," Grimes said. "One of the fantastic things about our team is our depth."

The men's and women's cross country teams are next in action on Nov. 12 at the NCAA MidEast Regional Championships.



COURTESY OF GEORGE MADISON

Lucca Franz '26 finished 51st overall.

Seven questions with David Porges '25: Men's swimming and diving

By OWEN PARK
Staff Writer

Owen Park: How did you first become involved in swimming?

David Porges: Swimming has always been a big part of my home life. My dad was a swimmer for Franklin and Marshall College, and my older brother is currently swimming at Princeton University. Some of the earliest memories I have are of pee-wee league swim meets — the sport has really been with me for as long as I can remember. In high school, my career was a little off-and-on because I was exploring some of my other interests, but I recommitted to training at the start of my sophomore year.

OP: What was the moment that you decided to pursue a collegiate swimming career?

DP: Meeting Coach Bob Rueppel — my dad introduced me. They became friends entirely by chance while he was visiting the area around Franklin and Marshall. My dad was visiting the campus and asked who the new men's swimming head coach was, and it just so happened to be Coach Rueppel. I didn't learn about this until my dad said he was going to catch up with a friend at Middlebury and that I should check out the school — with no expectations of this meeting impacting my prospects of coming here. I was fortunate enough to meet him, and when I spoke to him, he really demonstrated the values that I wanted to see in swimming: a community built around hard work and passion for the sport. I also met a lot of swimmers during my visit, and learning about what their lives were like at Middlebury made me strongly attached to the college and the thought of swimming here one day. From that moment on, I was focused on doing everything I could to get here.

OP: You mentioned that Coach Rueppel giving you a chance convinced you to try to swim in college. Were you strongly considering swimming beforehand?

DP: Not at all. I used to joke that my brother was the swimmer of the family. For the better part of the application process, I wasn't considering swimming at the collegiate level. I was working on my high school's



COURTESY OF DAVID PORGES

David Porges '25 zips through the water in the 1000m freestyle event at a home meet against Amherst.

paper and was more focused on exploring my interest in humanities. It was only when I started to look at different collegiate swimming programs that I realized that D3 programs would allow me to have a balance of athletics and academics in my life. I could be someone else outside of the pool while continuing to have that discipline, structure and love for the sport that I really enjoy. Middlebury was a program that kept popping up. Meeting Coach Rueppel really pushed me over the edge to try to be recruited.

OP: Have you been able to find that balance between athletics and extracurriculars?

DP: Absolutely. I've gotten to know a lot of people outside of the swim team, which is amazing. I'm currently on the SGA finance committee, and I'm going to go to the Student Conference on Student Affairs in West Point next week to represent Middlebury. This is all possi-

ble because we have coaches that are very flexible whenever a conflict comes up — something that I feel I wouldn't have if I wasn't at a D3 program. So, when I told my coach that I was going to go to that conference, he said, "I'm so excited for you; let's see how we can structure that week of training." Even though I won't be at Middlebury, my coach and I are on the same page about how I can stay in shape, whether it's training with the cadets at West Point or with my old club team in NYC.

OP: What would you say are your favorite aspects of being on the swim team?

DP: Everything, honestly. I really have to thank our leadership for making the team what it is. All of our coaches are really committed to this team and the program. They have completely changed the culture since I've been here. Our captains are amazing leaders; they lead by example and show us how to work

cohesively in and out of the water, which is crucial since we're a really big team.

OP: What would you say is the biggest challenge you've faced on the swim team so far?

DP: Last year, during our season, I broke my elbow, which was definitely a tough challenge to overcome. However, I would say the biggest challenge so far had to be the pandemic; it really threw a wrench in our season and our ability to work as a team. Not being able to see one another affected our chemistry, especially during practices where we would normally train in pairs. Right now, I would say that these problems have gone away. The biggest challenges we have right now have to do with how well we can perform and how far we'll go as a team; we're focusing on the NESCACs and have only continued to get better through our work and team unity. If anything, the biggest challenge this year

will be for other teams in trying to keep up with us.

OP: Looking to the future, what are you the most excited for about this team?

DP: Seeing how our freshmen class will grow — we've got some amazing new faces this year. I was talking with Luke McNamara '26, one of the freshmen that's also swimming distance, and he was going super in depth about his strategies when doing flip turns. Even after practice, when people are super tired, he was still thinking about swimming, still trying to get better. He's the literal definition of having moxie, and that's pretty indicative of every newcomer to this team. I'm super stoked to train with them and to learn from them as community members.

Editor's Note: This interview has been lightly edited for clarity and brevity.

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